

LOUVAIN: A TRAGEDY

ROBERTS

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LOUVAIN  
A TRAGEDY



# LOUVAIN: A TRAGEDY

IN THREE ACTS

BY

CHARLES V. H. ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "THE CALL OF SORROW," "THE  
SUBLIME SACRIFICE," ETC.

In thine adversity there is  
Not one will call thee friend. When mortal heart  
Beats outward for the healing touch—the little  
Things for its easing never come. Sorrow  
Is an Exile, which hath no portion in the time  
And tale and scorching brain of selfishness.

*From The Call of Sorrow*

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*To My Mother*

*Foreword*

An historical drama founded upon facts  
largely existing at the present day.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE KING OF THE BELGIANS

THE QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS

THE GERMAN MINISTER TO BELGIUM

THE CARDINAL, ARCHBISHOP OF MALINES

COUNTESS THERESE DE MURIER

*A Member of the Brussels Aristocracy*

MARIE LOUISE.....*Her only Daughter*

MONSIEUR GASTON LAFERE...*A Nobleman of Louvain*

MADAME LAFERE.....*His Wife*

EUGENIE..*Their Daughter and Cousin-of Marie Louise*

CAPTAIN JEAN ST. VALLIEN..*A young Belgian Officer*

COUNT PIERRE DE BOMBEL

*An old Friend of the de Muriers*

BARON ANTON OBERHAUS

*Connected with the German Secret Service in Brussels*

GUESTS, UHLANS, ORDERLIES, ROYAL GUARDS, SENATORS,  
COUNSELLORS, SOLDIERS, AIDES, LACKEYS,

SERVANTS, ETC., ETC.



ACT I



## ACT I

TIME — End of July, 1914.

PLACE — Brussels, Belgium.

Evening.

SCENE:

*In the handsome apartment suite of the Countess de Murier on the Boulevard de Waterloo. The near end of an evening's entertainment. Servants hand about refreshments. Groups of guests — some are standing, others sitting on chairs and lounges. A great many vases filled with flowers. Furnishings and hangings belong to the style of the Renaissance. At the rise of the curtain Marie Louise is seen at the piano. The Count de Bombel and the young officer, St. Vallien, and Baron Oberhaus are standing near her obviously engrossed in her playing.*

BOMBEL (*striking one of the basso keys of the piano*).

Bravo! I'll take the base or despite my years

Be pantomiming on my toes. Loud pedal!

One! Two! In age there's always  
genius.

[*sighing*]

Though we are senseless fools at best.

MARIE LOUISE (*smiling*).

Don't

Be silly!

ST. V.

Play, please, an aria of Puccini's  
His notes are golden harp-strings in  
themselves.

BOMBEL.

Sad songs—soft recorders! Ah, bah!  
May Cupid stop my breath—I hate that  
kind  
Of music—something rhythmic, comic,  
less  
Sublime!

MARIE LOUISE.

We are not all soulless!

BOMBEL.

Tut, tut! You're jesting.

[MARIE LOUISE *plays Rudolf's Roman-  
za from La Boheme*]

Dream appearing mournful melody!

OBERHAUS.

At least to me it seems so. Pardon—  
'Mid these sweetmeats, beauties, and per-  
fumes.

[*To himself*]

More like tavern counsels staged by im-  
beciles.

Dream, laugh, go lightly—but what's  
coming?

[*Aloud*]

Ach! Mademoiselle, your touch is royal.

[*To himself again*]

Peace makes one grim and horny about  
the knees.

These walls shall be blazoned with the  
shapes of power;

Yon vases wait, but for the torch of fire.

ST. V.

Music calms the agitation of one's soul;  
Alike on laughing as in breaking hearts.

BOMBEL (*walking over towards the* COUNT-  
ESS).

My dear Therese, poor François would  
be proud  
Of her.

COUNTESS.

Pierre, I'm nervous.

BOMBEL.

Why, Madame?

COUNTESS.

I fear the crime at Serajevo.

BOMBEL.

Does  
A martyr always start a new religion?

COUNTESS.

Yes—yes—a critical hour is on the  
world!

BOMBEL.

Nonsense! Nonsense! Shall I bray as  
a mule  
Because a Hapsburg plays the ass?

COUNTESS.

We are standing in a crypt of history.

BOMBEL.

Blest be the Fates that gave me sense!  
No wars, Therese, will come within our  
days;

Cash is trump and crops pay the winner.

[*Addressing the BARON*]

Isn't it so, my dear Baron?

OBERHAUS (*thoughtfully*).

Life is a strange menagerie;  
Nothing but feasting in its present cages.  
Therefore, my friends, less chance of war,  
methinks,  
Than Beelzebub would pray or cross  
himself.

BOMBEL.

Right! I agree.

OBERHAUS.

That's philosophy.  
Wilhelm, George, and Nicholas, next  
month,  
Will be playing billiards in Marienbad.

COUNTESS (*half contemptuously*).

Do you think so?

OBERHAUS.

I am sure of it, Countess.

[*OBERHAUS takes his leave, also the  
other guests*]

COUNTESS (*turning off a few of the electric lights*).

Pierre, I've lived past sixty-seven years;  
I do not trust that man—like all the  
Boche  
He means no good in Brussels.

BOMBEL.

Ridiculous!  
They are swine—but what have we to  
fear?  
Pshaw! War is farthest from all minds.

COUNTESS (*rising nervously*)

Events are bound and huge dominions  
hang  
Teeming for some chaos that's to be.

BOMBEL (*rubbing his hands*).

Whims—sky-shimmer dreams!  
On form and feature Arbitration's writ;  
Large armies soon will be an ancient  
folly.  
You're terrorized by every prating pa-  
per.  
Shells cannot rumble if banks store the  
powder.  
Madame, you forget—

[Enter EUGENIE]

EUGENIE (*interrupting BOMBEL while the COUNTESS heeds the occasion to retire*).

How many war  
Scares have you conjured up? Why vex  
the Saints  
By argument?

BOMBEL.

War is impossible.

MARIE LOUISE (*seriously*).

Born in sunlight and in noble air,  
My mother never speaks unreasonably.

ST. V.

A huge concern is formed across the  
Rhine.

EUGENIE.

Yes, I think the Baron's double-faced  
and sly,  
And that he fawns upon our hospitality.

MARIE LOUISE.

There are evil rumours—

BOMBEL.

Those chirps are in the twitter of the  
press;

Editors mating with affairs of state;  
 Vice has at least the shame to hide itself.  
 O, sighs and cries and litanies,  
 How our press does feel that virtue's in  
     its debt

When it doth brand the vicious into light;  
 Parchment writ for that especial grace  
 And flung as a bone to curs for education;  
 Prattlings aureoled into a smear of ink,  
 Under carnage, lechery, theft, and gold.  
 A sou for it!

Who needs must read what the devil  
     prints,  
 Half-smothered in a pulp of mud and  
     dirt?

Chimney-sweepers' love and scandals  
     blacker,  
 And strange to say—pray read you no  
     more—

Divorce and courtesans are sanctified,  
 Clad in the raiment of a thousand stars,  
 To swell the Treasury of the Sacred  
     Press.

A sou for it!

St. V.

Keep calm, Bombel, keep calm!

BOMBEL.

O'er three score years o' living, sir,  
A man hath a right to his expression.

ST. V.

He who reasons, compromises.

MARIE LOUISE.

Such similes.

EUGENIE.

Come, let us talk about my party. Mother  
Expects us surely Thursday. In our gar-  
den  
You will see—

BOMBEL.

Moon flowers?

EUGENIE (*laughing*).

Yes, Bombel—you may pluck them for  
us every  
Evening.

BOMBEL (*inquisitively*).

Wines?

EUGENIE.

Wines, and the very best,  
The best—

BOMBEL.

Ha! Ha! Well! Love wines —  
Men have their senses sometimes; love  
women —  
Never are we sane!

EUGENIE (*to* ST. VALLIEN).

You, Jean, of course, will come?

ST. V.

Thanks — unless some unexpected orders  
intervene.

EUGENIE.

Louvain never looked more beautiful,  
As from our villa's hillside, yester morn.  
The Belgian vale lay wrapped in day-  
dawn's rose,  
Frail clouds were dimmed of stars, and  
hung fleece-white  
As vineyards glistened of gems, and sweet  
airs stirred  
The deep-grown fields. Rocks and  
spires —

BOMBEL.

Lotus-lanterns and candle-lights — a lov-  
er's nest!

No nibbling rats at gala-feasts — Eugenie.  
Your pardon! I should tune my speech.  
Dull wits and my gray hairs would spoil  
it all.

Insist? Well — I'll be there, if but an  
effigy

That stands and stares — good-night!  
good-night!

[*Exit*]

EUGENIE (*with an air of satisfaction*).

I return to Louvain in the morning.  
Bon nuit, Jean! Marie — au revoir!

[*Exit through door on the left*]

ST. V.

Mademoiselle, may I remain a moment  
longer?

Then I would follow Oberhaus — because  
I know he holds a secret meeting.

MARIE LOUISE (*sitting on a lounge*).

How do you feel — this war cloud, Jean  
— I'm puzzled

And fear a thousand things that have no  
name?

ST. V. (*seating himself beside her*).

I care not—think less of deeper glooms  
tonight;

There are times for laughing, play, and  
times for war.

MARIE LOUISE.

You are almost rude!

ST. V. (*tenderly*).

Marie, beloved!

MARIE LOUISE (*with feigned surprise*).

Oh! never have you spoken thus before!

ST. V.

For days I've sat and thought and could  
not speak,

In words of mortal sweetness unexpress-  
ed.

[*Taking her hand in his*]

I love you—not to say it, would make  
Nature

Less divine—though something surely  
would

Reveal it. Your arms are wreathed  
about my neck

In every deed, 'mid whispered tales and  
 silvered  
 Links in dreams.

[*With one hand on MARIE LOUISE'S  
 cheek he compels her to lift up her  
 face*]

You are the sea-mist and  
 The fire of stars. I love you — love you —  
 with  
 Those words must you have further  
 pleading?  
 Your eyes, your lips, your hands, your  
 hair, are like  
 The coiled sweetness of a summer's night  
 That throbs and shades in Heaven 'til  
 it falls.

MARIE LOUISE.

'Tis easy to enjoy but hard to love.  
 Is it true you love me?

ST. V. (*with intensity*).

Doubt all else but that.  
 What do you fear?

MARIE LOUISE.

I do not know — I love you!

Yet tremble with strange charms, strange  
thoughts, strange hopes.

ST. V. (*kissing her passionately*).

'Tis the pale reflection of our happiness,  
Severing the clouds of future heritages.

[*Drawing a ring from his waist-coat pocket*]

You will be my wife?

MARIE LOUISE (*looking curiously at the  
ring*).

And that you dared assume?

ST. V.

'Tis proof of love—such confidence!

MARIE LOUISE (*teasingly*).

Self-confidence!

ST. V. (*placing the betrothal ring on her fin-  
ger*).

With this ring, dear love, our souls are  
circled

In one flame—that band of faith which  
knots

Us unto death—fixed there

Amid the heavens as predestined.

I'd cast a kingdom on the seas tonight

And live in you — in fires and pangs of  
joy.

MARIE LOUISE.

I'm touched by that I never touched be-  
fore;  
I feel unfathomed deeps I did not know.

ST. V.

A star doth guide us from the far off  
skies.

MARIE LOUISE.

My life, my all — in these dear hands, I  
place.

ST. V.

Such moments go like laughing sands of  
gold —

MARIE LOUISE (*dreamily*).

From some dim farther shore, we tread  
and knew.

ST. V.

Mind feeds on mind — the essence of past  
lives  
In skies of silver webs and soft sweet  
scents,  
The moonlit nights of Babylon dynasty.

MARIE LOUISE.

Whispered gently as now I—“Love!  
Love!”

ST. V.

Perhaps you were a queen; I do not know.

MARIE LOUISE.

My lips had blessed you e'er I knew you  
here.

ST. V.

In sweet compression—silent counter-  
sign.

MARIE LOUISE.

And if then, exiled in the isles of Death,  
Life came gladly back into my veins.

[*Passionately*]

Kiss me again—again and yet again!  
O Love, my love, my love, my first and  
best  
And dearest— with such predestined cer-  
tainty  
Dost thou o'erwhelm the human soul.

ST. V.

There is no greater use of things than  
loving them;

In flowers of gladness or in seeds of grief,  
All else wanes off and comes to nothing-  
ness.

Through all the sophistries of crafty  
mind,

Mould our shallow pleading as we may,  
By laws that are themselves the breach  
of law,

The lowliest thing is sanctified by Love,

MARIE LOUISE (*tenderly*).

And sheddeth incense over Destiny.

ST. V.

Oft the touchstone of true love is sorrow;

MARIE LOUISE.

The sands of Life seem firm and strong  
And spell their sweetness over land and  
sea.

ST. V.

By apprehensions closer are we clasped.

MARIE LOUISE (*passionately*).

Look deep, ah deep, look deep into my  
eyes!

I have no words: what of that?

Breathes a greater love than silent love,

To feel thought waiting full of happy things?

ST. V.

Surely you tread where the angels tread,  
And hear the echoes in God's sacred aisle.

MARIE LOUISE (*passionately*).

Forget — forget — all — all — Jean, I love  
you!

CURTAIN

ACT II  
SCENE I



## ACT II

A week later.      PLACE—Brussels, Belgium  
Evening.

### SCENE I :

*A simple ante-room adjoining the Assembly Hall, or Chamber of Deputies, in the Palais de La Nation. The din of voices is heard from the Hall where the members of the Assembly and Deputies are feverishly awaiting the arrival of the King and Queen.*

*Enter the royal couple, the King in his service uniform, the Queen in evening dress, passing on their way to preside over the Assembly.*

THE KING.

You know all?

THE QUEEN.

I guess, not knowing. Tell me.

THE KING.

Honour has fallen from its heights and  
Time  
Turned atheist.

THE QUEEN.

Meanwhile, what will we do?  
Not understanding everything, I fear.

THE KING.

'Tis all a cheat the world is civilized,  
A dead star that in gloom grows less and  
less.

THE QUEEN.

Do I not know it! I myself!

THE KING.

It is as if my own sense mocked me. Our  
Neutrality is sacred to the world.  
In all scanning of prophetic heavens,  
No star showed us this—this treachery.  
It will blister history's page to write it  
down.

THE QUEEN.

William thinks himself a God and dreams  
strange dreams,  
Unto a ladder whose topmost rung is  
Heaven.

THE KING.

Such progeny! Can a pack of Hohen-  
zollerns sway the earth,

Have power to kindle it and calm at will?

[*Shaking his head*]

A wave in modern times of such ambition  
Would break into the foam of foolish-  
ness.

It is our soul—it is our name that we  
are free.

THE QUEEN.

The ultimatum is outrageous,  
And its grim phrasers part of secret  
shame,

Whose arguments and pleas demand their  
due.

We hold the nation's future in our hands;  
'Mid cold deceit and low ambition's  
slime,

There lies defense that turns all war to  
virtue.

THE KING (*smiling at her proudly*).

I thought you did not understand, my  
dear.

THE QUEEN.

No, no, I see it all as if accomplished,  
And breathe in courage as I lean on you.

Who has not suffered by this perfidy?  
If we resist not evil, evil wins.  
Ere long the Prussian monarchy will be  
The source of infinite calamity,  
Not alone unto itself — but to the world!  
Come — come, my lord, they are awaiting  
us.

CURTAIN

ACT II  
SCENE 2



## ACT II

A few moments later.

### SCENE 2:

*In the "Hall of the Chamber" of the Palais de La Nation. In the foreground slightly to the left are tiers where members of the Belgian Assembly, the Drafting Committee from the Foreign Office, and many deputies are seated. Some are talking earnestly, others writing, while a few men walk about in silence, touched by the solemnity of the occasion. In the background near the center of the stage rises the throne. There are vessels of porcelain and gold and other candelabra. On the walls hang rich frames surmounted by coronets. Between the various portraits are panoplies of armour and tapestries depicting episodes of the different centuries. A large door is prominent on the right.*

*[The President of the Assembly arises and bids the rest to follow]*

THE PRESIDENT.

His Majesty, the King! Her Majesty,  
the Queen!

*[Enter the KING and QUEEN accom-*

*panied by royal guards. They are greeted with thundering applause and wild enthusiasm. The royal pair ascend the throne, holding their heads high with looks of firm determination in their faces.*

*A profound silence falls over the spectators]*

THE KING (*rising and addressing the Assembly*).

In the name of the Nation, I greet you here as brethren, and in all things now or yet to come, to be guided by your wisdom. We are Belgians, proud of our free institutions and moral conquests. One single vision fills our minds—Belgium's threatened independence, which Heaven bids us cherish; steady courage—union among us all. We hope the events which threaten us will not happen. But if the hope be vain—our valiant youth has risen; not one in this Nation will fail in his duty. Julius Cæsar said: "The Belgians are the bravest people of all

Gaul." That is a goodly thing to think upon! The muffled tread of many hundred years follows the path of our fathers, washed red with the noblest blood of history. Ours is the privilege of sacrifice! Can we ask of Life a greater boon than that? In Flanders, in Wallonia, in our cities, towns, and country sides, one thought alone impels our hearts—our patriotism! This the heaviest blows of Hell cannot defile. We are armed ready for the greatest sacrifices. If we fight, we fight to keep our country free, or else to war forevermore to help an empire bind the world as we are bound. Belgians arise—be worthy of yourselves, be confident in the justice of your cause.

[*Wild and tumultuous applause*]

[*Enter a ROYAL GUARD*]

THE GUARD.

The German Minister, your Majesty.

[*A solemn hush falls over the Assembly*]

THE KING (*in a clear voice*).

He is expected — bid him enter.

[*Exit* GUARD]

[*Enter* GERMAN MINISTER, *bowing before the Assembly and saluting the KING and QUEEN*]

THE KING.

Each moment works to some new crisis;  
what now, Sir?

GERMAN MINISTER.

Your Majesty — your answer — 'tis the  
hour.

For unmolested passage we will pay  
A big indemnity. We are the stronger  
And uphold the better cause. But, sire,  
It is with mortal grief we so demand.

THE KING (*smiling*).

I know that well, but cannot credit it.

THE QUEEN.

Is it a mad man's vision that you ask?  
Do you think our minds and hearts are  
turned to dust,  
That we let our souls stand naked to the  
world,

Pierced by such poisoned promises?

[*Applause*]

GERMAN MINISTER (*looking curiously towards the KING*).

I do not understand all this, your Majesty.

VOICES FROM THE ASSEMBLY.

We do—we do—to arms! To arms!

THE QUEEN.

Your great ideals, your radiant living treaties!

Are they to turn to scars in deadened stripes,

And mock the draughts of Fate? I'm half ashamed! [*Applause*]

GERMAN MINISTER.

Dull and drear and “scraps of paper” now!

The French would place you in far greater jeopardy. [*Hisses*]

[*To the QUEEN again with some emotion*]

Do you not plead against this war,  
Counsel surrender, in our necessity?

THE QUEEN.

William is surely mad.

THE KING.

A gracious scheme,  
That would entice with crafty, crooked  
words.

GERMAN MINISTER (*indignantly*).

Not at all! What is your answer?  
Necessity — that only holds the day.

VOICES IN THE ASSEMBLY.

Rifles! Rifles! To the frontier! To the  
frontier!

THE KING (*angrily*).

Dare you thus address a Belgian King  
And so presume on our high dignity?

THE QUEEN.

To make us traitors for your strategy?

THE KING (*rising and addressing the MINISTER in tones of mingled dignity and defiance*).

Hear my answer, and let it echo from  
The walls of Potsdam to the farthest vales  
Of Eastern Prussia. What you see in this

Assembly is one party firmly linked  
With the people—sustained by them to  
maintain

The sacred heritage of their fathers.

The area of this little state is small—

But should that bear its souls into an alien  
world,

There to grasp around 'mid grinning  
bones.

Death shall be our master, not dishonour.

[*Tumultuous applause*]

No one in this Chamber is offended?

A foreigner's foot on Belgium's precious  
soil,

We resist it! We fight it! Man for man,  
gun

For gun! Fort by fort! Town by town!  
Aye,

Street by street, o'er sites and plains un-  
born.

A nation answers you—not a king!

Is there anyone here offended? No!

[*Pointing his finger angrily at the*

MINISTER]

What has been offended—What! What!

Honour is offended, Justice is  
 Offended, Truth is offended — the World  
 is offended.

The blood of such offended shall not be  
 shed

Save to congeal in the clots and stench of  
 Prussian

Perfidy. 'Tis a crime too big for Satan's  
 eye,

Whose devilish vision would recoil within  
 Itself, blinded by the very terror of it.

An empire built on blood and iron will  
 fall.

Wrong is its own destroyer. Its end

Is in itself and by itself. That is

A balance in the scales of Time which I  
 Would suggest your state weigh well.

We have faith in our destiny — power in  
 our honour.

A nation defending itself is respected by  
 all;

That nation *will not* perish.

THE QUEEN.

Say it again — say it again! God lends  
 Some moments out of Heaven — this is  
 one! [Wild applause]

GERMAN MINISTER.

Your answer doth provoke the rage of  
war,  
A wilder madness than I ever dreamed.

THE KING.

It is for my army to decide on that.

VOICES FROM THE ASSEMBLY.

It will—it will—to the frontier—to  
Liege!

GERMAN MINISTER (*to the QUEEN*).

Must I convey this?

THE QUEEN.

So please you, Sir!

[*Exit GERMAN MINISTER followed by*  
GUARD]

THE KING.

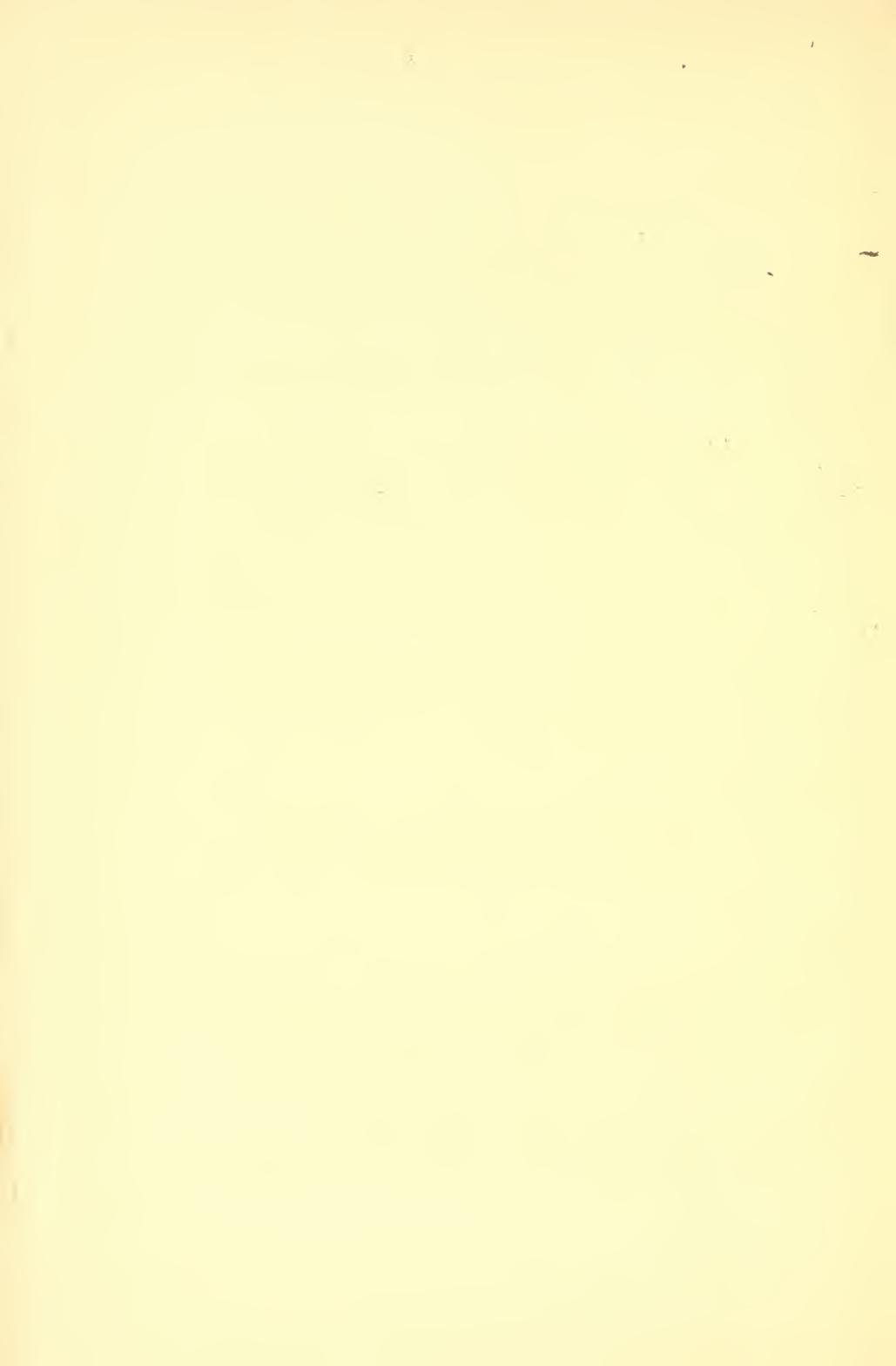
Spread my answer on the record. We  
Adjourn. Complete mobilization is or-  
dered.  
I go to the front immediately.

CURTAIN



ACT II

SCENE 3



## ACT II

Near dawn the next morning.

PLACE—Brussels, Belgium.

### SCENE 3:

*The Queen's private boudoir in the Royal Palace. The room is dark save for the subdued light reflecting from a table-lamp, and shaded brackets on either side of a mantel piece. A window is in the background. The furnishings are in old Flemish style.*

*As the curtain rises the King is seen in full military uniform pacing back and forth. The Queen sits on a lounge attired in negligee.*

### THE KING.

Yesterday and to-day, God is the same,  
Yet His world seems damned more utterly.

### THE QUEEN.

What will be must be, that is inevitable;  
But He will send angels down, I'm sure  
of it.

### THE KING (*pausing near the mantel*).

Alas, the load of life that lives for kings,

Under whose torments inwardly we  
groan!

Is there no peace within this high estate,  
Whose acts are but the choice of circum-  
stance?

O, world, where is thy honour? What  
shall I say—

In saying, turn back the arithmetic of  
Fate?

Damned errors, power—praise! Judg-  
ment swerves

Aside and counterfeits its own decree;  
Akin is conscience then in insurrection,  
And breaketh the ranks of reason's ordi-  
nance.

Dignity of kings with puppet words,  
Gaudy veils and trappings of command  
Turned reversely into shrouded worms—  
No! No! Had I not eyes to see dis-  
honour,

Which on their retina did not let me err?  
By heaven, 'tis a deed as black as Hell!

Little Belgium—perhaps it were a pity—  
The stars and moon do veil their beams  
in sorrow;

[*To the QUEEN*]

But— but— what else, what else could I  
decree?

There's ease in chains, when anguish in a  
crown.

Many the fools, that sit on thrones in  
slavish parts

Playing a dicer's game— diplomacy  
Loaded on the throws from mightier  
arms,

That bullies Justice from the table. So!  
Treaties! How quickly pales the ink  
there writ,

When greedy Conquest holds the blotter.  
Such as I am a king— no lesser man!

Strange, is it not?

Never a smooth sword, but there's mur-  
der in it

Infected by its gleaming heritage.

Conclusions by results are falsified,  
And prowl around us with a reeking  
blade.

Necessity— indemnity— invasion!

I'll not mix with such usurers of the  
mind,

Who would keep cash going while honour  
starves in rags.

Is this a baby-fist— rattles? No!

There are true men not yet among the  
stars

Condemning treason to a robber's grave!

We must not fall! 'Tis war, then— war!

Not for

France nor England— but for Belgium's  
word.

THE QUEEN (*rushing up and passionately  
throwing her arms about her husband*).

Hold me, kiss me, hide me in your love!

Keep and defend as ours this holy cause,

Which God assigns to us by highest right.

THE KING (*looking out of the window*).

It is a gloomy day that breaketh, dear,

Yet it showeth signs of being a brilliant  
day.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I



### ACT III

TIME— August, 1914.

Evening. PLACE— Louvain, Belgium.

SCENE I :

*At the villa of Monsieur Gaston Lafere, picturesquely situated on a hill above the city. The foreground presents part of a spacious and handsomely decorated living-room, while through open casement windows and large French doors is seen a garden full of oleanders, roses, and an abundance of white blossoms. A fountain slightly to the right splashes gently, and through the spray is glimpsed an arbor covered with vines. Monsieur and Madame Lafere, Eugenie, and Marie Louise are seated at table in the garden evidently just finishing dinner.*

LAFERE (*rising from the table and pacing in and out of the room*).

Why, Belgium— a nation— seven million souls,  
Dazzling and proud since the days of  
Julius Casear!  
I'll trust our king to hold the dastards  
back

By bloody checking of these wanton  
 wrongs,  
 Until the French arrive to then complete  
 a rout!

[*Pounding his fist on the table*]

That is my guess and I'll vouch the mat-  
 ter true!

MME. L. (*bitterly*).

Be kind to me! Another day like this  
 My hair becomes whiter than the snow!

[*Passing through the living-room to a  
 door on the left*]

These hordes—these hordes against us  
 ten to one,

I cannot—cannot share such confidence!

[*Exit*]

MARIE LOUISE (*seriously*).

How little we know of our country's  
 peril,

Grace in all her steps—but, oh, so small!  
 I feel a fear not easy to divine.

EUGENIE (*tenderly pressing her cousin's  
 hand*).

Sweetest one! 'Tis Jean, you think of  
 with

The king—your love must brave the  
hour's pain;

I wish I were a man! Equal and like  
And yet why—less in war? Our flesh  
should fight

With flesh, and soul with soul, to stand or  
fall;

[*Pushing herself and chair back from  
the table*]

Instead these graceful acts and thousand  
decencies!

MARIE LOUISE (*with a slight smile*).

Our party had a sudden ending!

EUGENIE.

Aye,

And even Bombel has become all serious.

LAFERE (*lighting a cigar*).

The rascal said he would return at nine.

At any rate he's now convinced of war;

But turns his wit to make its pangs the  
less.

MARIE LOUISE (*murmuring to herself and  
strolling over to the fountain*).

I am and ever shall be—but a woman,

Onward to journey with far changeless  
Time,  
That ever sits upon the throne of Mem-  
ory.

The ages pass and we go down to death  
In lamentations on unheeding air.  
This eve may lay some plight upon the  
world.

[*Plucking a rose and pressing it to her  
lips*]

O rose, you moonbeams and you silvered  
spray,  
Bended, swaying soft in cooling night,  
How little you do know of human woe;  
Unwitting sentinels 'neath sorrow's  
shades,  
There while to whisper, sob, and drip  
with tears.

[*Passionately*]

Him I love is all my own! Oh, Love!  
You make us rich and yet you make us  
poor,  
Wherein the bitter sweet of your dilem-  
ma!

You take your sorrows from the touch of  
Time,  
But bear your joys into Eternity!

EUGENIE (*calling MARIE LOUISE*).

Marie!

MARIE LOUISE (*returning to the table*).

Yes, Eugenie!

[*The door bell rings, followed by impatient knocking. LAFERE and MARIE LOUISE enter the room, while EUGENIE hurriedly opens the door. Enter BOMBEL wildly. He throws his hat and coat covered with dust on a nearby chair*]

EUGENIE.

What news?

[*Enter MME. LAFERE*]

MME. L.

Quickly, tell us!

MARIE LOUISE.

Speak!

BOMBEL.

Terrible—terrible! Liege, Liege has  
fallen!

LAFERE (*trying to be calm*).

Bah, rumors! It is impregnable!

MME. L.

My God!

MARIE LOUISE.

Jean, my beloved!

BOMBEL (*pacing up and down*).

Rumors! I wish it were!

Such artillery the world has never

Known. Our forts were powdered down  
like so much

Sugar. Now troops come swifter than  
the wire.

LAFERE.

What—what do you mean?

BOMBEL.

I say,

Glowing in hordes adown the roads

The Huns are already at our gates;

Two mounted Uhlans gave chase behind  
my car,

And may be now upon us any moment.

[*The roaring of distant artillery is  
heard across the valley*]

LAFERE.

Come—make an end of this excitement!

[*Sudden clattering of horses' hoofs up the roadway*]

EUGENIE.

What's that?

BOMBEL.

Uhlands!

MME. LAFERE (*clasping the girls*).

Children! Children!

[*Violent pounding on the door*]

LAFERE (*trying to calm them*).

Between us here—the law of reason rules.

[*Walking towards the door*]

Stand back! I'll let them in. Soldiers  
Are but men—and can be gentlemen  
withal.

[*He opens the door. Enter two Uh-  
lans while an officer is seen outside  
talking rapidly with a dozen or more  
men still unmounted*]

1ST UHLAN (*roughly*).

Who lives here?

LAFERE.

I — Gaston Lafere!

2ND UHLAN (*evidently recognizing BOMBEL*).

Old speeder,

'Twas a chase we had, but here we are!

Give us a drink, host — God save the  
Kaiser!

EUGENIE (*flushing and attempting to break  
away from her mother*).

Men without the manners of their brutes!

2ND UHLAN (*with rough sarcasm*).

Long live Peace! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Beauties — drinks and kisses here!

[*Enter an officer who is immediately  
recognized as BARON OBERHAUS*]

OBERHAUS (*rebuking the Uhlans*).

Silence! Fear not, my friends, but from  
your faces

We do not receive it seems the warmest  
welcome.

I ask your pardon, but certain things —

BOMBEL (*interrupting him*).

You! Oberhaus! Are you now drafted  
into  
Treason's ranks to consort in this hell's  
abyss?

OBERHAUS.

Dear fellow — God's altar is in Prussia's  
heart,  
Your king played false with generosity.

EUGENIE (*angrily*).

I knew he was a traitor — said  
It from the first.

OBERHAUS (*grinning*).

I am a Prussian — lady.

EUGENIE.

Yes — the dark in soul see but the shadow  
Of themselves.

OBERHAUS (*to LAFERE*).

We shall have to make our  
quarters here

Tonight.

BOMBEL (*growling to himself*).

Noodle-skull — soap bubble brains!

[*Aloud sarcastically*]

Life is a strange menagerie, eh?  
Beelzebub *has* prayed and crossed him-  
self.

OBERHAUS (*becoming angry*).

Old man — no mockery or witticisms  
Here. We come — it's God's concern,  
not yours!

[*Addressing his men*]

Search the house!

LAFERE.

Dare you, sir?

BOMBEL (*with another growl*).

Spindle shanks in uniform!

OBERHAUS (*to his Uhlans*).

Enchain that man — this war is business!

EUGENIE (*angrily*).

In business one can be a gentleman.

OBERHAUS (*ignoring her*).

Take him to Louvain. Bread and water  
soon

Methinks will reduce that pouch of wit.

[*The room is now filled with soldiers*

*who are ruthlessly searching and throwing everything into disorder. LAFERE and BOMBEL glower in helpless anger, while the women, especially MARIE LOUISE, stand, as it were, transfixed. OBERHAUS makes no attempt to check the outrage]*

MME. LAFERE (*with desperate but dignified appeal*).

Sir—have you so flung your faculties to  
beasts

That you do thus deface a home that in  
The past extended open hospitality?

OBERHAUS (*coldly*).

Blame your puppet king, Madame, not  
me!

*[The Uhlans having already given their leader several drinks, he approaches with a slight stagger toward MARIE LOUISE]*

Sweet lady, my eyes are filled with star-  
dust;

I hear the melody from La Boheme.

*[Imitating MARIE LOUISE at the piano]*

Pianissimo! Both hands! Sweet equity!  
Warm as dipped in summer's high keyed  
air!

Rudolf! Mimi! Fortissimo!

Pause and count the heart-beats of the  
scene.

BOMBEL (*trying to free himself*).

Oil-tongued brute! Hands off that girl!

[*Sudden commotion in the garden. ST. VALLIEN staggers through the door, in his shirt sleeves. He is deadly pale and the blood runs from a wound in his left shoulder*]

MARIE LOUISE (*rushing madly up to her lover*).

Jean, Jean — you here? Oh, true dream!  
Your eyes — your lips — alive — I hear  
your heart!

Men, have pity — this is the man I love!  
I felt in exile but I am home — now.

ST. V. (*as MARIE LOUISE presses her arms tightly about his neck*).

Beloved . . . Marie!

OBERHAUS (*walking roughly up to where they are standing*).

Dare a Belgian soldier enter here,  
How in Hell did you get through our  
lines?

ST. V. (*recognizing him*).

You freeze me, Baron—but that's my  
secret, sir;  
Now you become a man and leave this  
house!

OBERHAUS.

Bull puppy this, and wounded too!

[*To MARIE LOUISE*]

My compliments—your lover's surely  
game!

[*Calling two Uhlans*]

But now to business—take him out and  
shoot him.

ST. V. (*sarcastically*).

That's true valour, sir! And I salute.

MARIE LOUISE (*kneeling*).

Oh, Saviour! Sacred Heart of Jesus,  
Thou, Who suffered, knowest pity well,

Why—why—why hast Thou forsaken  
us?

[*Rising and addressing OBERHAUS*]

What act—what sin—that's fair in war,  
Can give excuse for such—such deeds as  
these?

OBERHAUS.

Battles with Beauty must take a different  
course;  
War's for better use than argument.

MARIE LOUISE.

They shall go down and make the black-  
est and  
Most infamous stain upon the page of  
human  
History!

OBERHAUS.

Bah! Bah! Bah!  
'Tis woman gilds the earth with senti-  
ment;  
First I'm Prussian, next I'm not your  
king.

BOMBEL (*Hissingly*).

Carbuncle eyes!

OBERHAUS (*to his men*).

Muzzle that buffoon!

[*The BARON is now seen to slyly draw a revolver and fire a shot to deliberately wound one of his own men. The soldier staggers and falls to the floor*]

[*Roaringly*]

Treason! Murder! Hounds—assassins here!

Men! I command that order rule; this—  
This comes of being merciful!

[*The wounded German soldier is assisted into a chair*]

MARIE LOUISE (*glaring at Oberhaus*).

Does it not shame you to be called a man?

[*The Uhlans seize LAFERE, whom, with BOMBEL, they drag into the garden. MADAME LAFERE and EUGENIE rush desperately after them. EUGENIE is seen frantically beating one of the men with her fists as they pass through the French doors*]

OBERHAUS (*to* MARIE LOUISE).

You'll clasp a ghost where throbb'd a living love!

[*The* BARON *now struts back and forth, chuckling to himself, then nods to Uhlands to release* ST. VALLIEN]

[*Looking toward* ST. VALLIEN]

Now, to balance your account, my fellow!

[*To Marie Louise*]

Don't eat me up! Ha! So proud!  
Stand forth—and see your sweetheart's  
anger blaze!

[*He approaches* MARIE LOUISE. *At this moment* EUGENIE *rushes back into the room, her hair all dishevelled*]

EUGENIE (*wildly*).

They've killed—murdered—father and  
Bombel!

Oh, send me strength, my veins—not  
tears, but strength!

Destiny, destiny, take in thy hand some  
dust,

Compounded of some secret grains to  
make me,

E'en for a little while — a man.

[*To OBERHAUS*]

You writing coward —

[*An Uhlan seizes her and drags her  
back into the garden*]

OBERHAUS (*with cold indifference, glaring at  
ST. VALLIEN, and at the same time address-  
ing MARIE LOUISE with a rising, brutal pas-  
sion in his voice*).

Pouting lips and flashing eyes,

'Tis you that gives a soul to every star.

ST. V. (*gnashing his teeth with anger and tak-  
ing a step towards the Prussian*).

Be careful what you say, you Hun!

OBERHAUS.

Hold him!

[*The Uhlans again lay hold of ST. V.*]

MARIE LOUISE (*looking pitifully towards her  
lover*).

How can we pray these wrongs away?

Oh! God, if there be justice — answer me!

OBERHAUS (*with diabolical passion*).

We know, my sweet, more love across the  
Rhine

Than all the sages and divines who study  
 Moon and Scripture. Look not down!  
 Come—come—lift up your eyes—be  
 not afraid!

Ah! panting breasts—the crimson of  
 your mouth!

Talk of odors, talk of wines, 'tis all  
 A cloud, 'tis all a dream, but love—love!  
 O, do not wound me with that dagger  
 look,

For I'm a sage, in thirst come near to  
 drink.

However rude, hence courteous accents  
 flow—

My lady, do mine eyes her beauty see—  
 Conjecture safely on her charms con-  
 cealed.

[*Addressing ST. V.*]

You think that I am slower to admire,  
 Though a moth around a candle will be  
 slain.

[*Again, to MARIE LOUISE*]

You'll see your loved one's soul in Para-  
 dise,

Already now his face shines through the  
clouds.

[*Caressing her arms*]

Your swaying, melting body in its tints,  
ach!

The language of the night by Beauty  
flashed

O'er satin skin to ruby in your veins.

[*Another malicious glance towards ST.  
V.*]

While roses gather smiles and waves draw  
breath,

My shy and tender heart creeps up in  
fear—

Then soft as rain mists in the lilies' bed—  
You know——'tis there the flames con-  
sume the fire.

Give me a kiss—that nectar starts it all.

[*He seizes the girl and brutally presses  
his lips to hers*]

ST. V.

Dog! I'll live a moment to—

[*With almost superhuman strength the  
young Belgian tears himself from the*

*Uhlans, springs upon OBERHAUS and throws him violently to the floor. The Uhlans as planned, however, rush forward—one stabs ST. VALLIEN while the other deliberately shoots him through the heart. MARIE LOUISE with a cry falls fainting across her lover's body]*

*[From the garden the Prussian soldiers are heard singing  
"Deutschland uber alles."]*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 2



## ACT III

Ten days later. PLACE—Louvain, Belgium.  
Night.

### SCENE 2:

*At the crossroads outside of the City on Mount Cesar. In the foreground are the ruins of the Lafere villa, smouldering, charred, and desolate. Away in the distance the sky is illuminated with the flames destroying the city. The skeletons of her once famous edifices loom in sinister relief and melancholy memory against the sky.*

*Booming of cannon, shrieks of the wounded, and cries of the dying are heard,—followed by intermissions of ghostly stillness that are interrupted only by the bitter sobs of a woman.*

*In the faint-growing phantasmal light, Marie Louise is seen in the road bended low and kneeling before a wayside shrine. She is attired in black, riveted there by sorrow, but sanctified in her faith.*

*Cardinal, Archbishop of Malines, recognized by his stately bearing and his apparel, approaches to where Marie Louise is kneeling.*

*He pauses before the shrine.*

THE CARDINAL.

In the Name of the Father, and of the  
Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen!

[*Crossing himself as he stoops and  
gently touches MARIE LOUISE on the  
shoulder*]

My child!

MARIE LOUISE (*looking up into his face with  
an expression of mingled surprise and sor-  
row, changing to one of wonder and rever-  
ence*).

Father! Father! My strength—  
My prayers—I knew—I knew would  
soon be answered!

THE CARDINAL (*as Marie Louise moves and  
kneels at his feet*).

Bless you, my child, and be comforted in  
Him,  
His gentler judgment and His dearer  
mercy.  
The world is full of tears, but they are  
blessed  
Drops that water Faith and Hope.

MARIE LOUISE.

Alas!

O, can it be, my father, can it be?

THE CARDINAL.

There is reason for each life and every  
death,  
For shadows are the lights and lights the  
shadows.

MARIE LOUISE.

I have believed and prayed and loved,  
and yet  
My soul is crucified in agony;  
Torn from me the touch of all my earth-  
ly dreams.

THE CARDINAL.

Earthly dreams, dear girl, must needs be  
short.  
In this prelude to eternity—

MARIE LOUISE.

Ah, me!

THE CARDINAL.

There is nothing we may call our own  
but time;  
He is not gone, but merely sent before.

MARIE LOUISE.

I—I was so happy—Eminence!  
We two, were to each other all in all.

THE CARDINAL.

Such joys though oft self-made are God's  
decrees,  
Given and to be taken as He wills.  
The life that has not known—accepted  
sorrow  
Is untaught. Without its lesson there  
Would be no love. Pain superbly met  
Is half divine. The touch, the words,  
that soothe  
Another's woe, are but the tears of deeper  
Tenderness that drop from one's own eyes.  
This we know—having sorrowed and  
suffered in  
A dark abyss, nothing outside of eternal  
Life can last. This is our Calvary!

MARIE LOUISE.

What a joy it is to hear a voice like yours,  
One's sufferings therein are deified.  
Such words passed, give me lighter heart  
and fall

In saintly silence on my soul. Still—  
still,  
I am so human after all. O, where  
Is justice, vengeance? What are ambi-  
tion, effort,  
Life and prayer—this balance keeping  
'tween wrong  
And right, that fades and falters where  
the lightnings are?  
Rage, despair—is it come to the end of  
all,  
That stars are burnt to debris in the sky,  
And spectres turned in wheels of fire by  
A flaming Empire grim with blood and  
war,  
Our Earth down-trodden by these mur-  
derers?

**THE CARDINAL.**

Think not of vengeance, child, God is all  
just;  
There is no—no new sorrow. We are  
called upon  
To bear nothing that has not been borne  
before;  
That is a mystery, which is solely God's.

MARIE LOUISE.

Since Jean has died — his death is ever  
mine,

In loving nearness and in grieving tears.

[*Booming of artillery and cries heard  
from the city*]

Oh! these nights terrible at Hell's com-  
mand!

The clash of steel, the shouts, the groans  
— hear!

War's furrows — fingers everywhere;

The fixèd gaze of death and dying,

As opening blossoms of a bloody madness.

Life — life — life — War's fool!

Virtue powdered into howitzers.

O, God —

THE CARDINAL.

Hush — hush! God is nearer you  
Than is my speech — would you forget  
Him?

MARIE LOUISE.

Nay —

Oh! For me tell Him and I pray you to!  
That my heart doth look so outward after  
grief,

Seeming to pull me from the dust I came  
from.

THE CARDINAL.

No one measures life save He who deals  
it.

MARIE LOUISE.

War is a scourge—

THE CARDINAL.

Yet a minister, as God  
With divinest Potency seems cruellest  
when  
Most kind. Take courage!  
These are but the suburbs of His ways.  
In this dusky labyrinth of life,  
Drinking our cups of woe and happiness,  
We go from darkness into light— from  
change  
To immortality— from death by death,  
To life undying.

MARIE LOUISE.

Long experience  
Is disciplined to grief,

THE CARDINAL.

As we do hope  
And be the less distressed,

MARIE LOUISE.

Where desolations  
Darken all the vale. Your Eminence,  
I feel changed as by some miracle,  
Though still great sorrow weighs upon  
my soul;  
This long, long way from pain to pain  
alone!

THE CARDINAL.

There is no such road by which you must  
return.

There is a sun which setteth not forever,  
And of whose gladness there is no end.

[*With one hand on MARIE LOUISE'S  
shoulder, the CARDINAL raises the  
other and makes the sign of the  
Cross*]

So quickly—shall this chalice pass away.

[*MARIE LOUISE rises and stands beside  
the CARDINAL. They gaze intently  
upon the burning city. A luminous  
Cross gradually outlines itself against  
the sky, shines for a moment, and  
slowly fades away from view.*]

CURTAIN





# The Sublime Sacrifice

By Charles V. H. Roberts

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